

THE RULE OF GRACE

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*“Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet;
and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.”*

Luke 4:27

OUR Savior never sought popularity. His ministry was so attractive that thousands thronged to hear Him, glad to catch the accents of His instructive tongue, but He never for a moment sought to preach flesh-pleasing truths, neither did He keep back any doctrine by which it might be feared that His hearers would be disgusted.

On this occasion He was speaking to His own townsmen. The young man, who had left the place for a while and who, during His absence, had acquired great fame as a teacher and miracle-worker, had come home and there was, naturally, much curiosity to hear Him. They supposed that He would make the town, where He had been brought up, to be the chief place of His benedictions. They were His fellow townsmen, so surely they had some claim upon Him.

But our Lord, knowing right well that, if they really understood His teaching, they would not be pleased with it—and knowing that the blessings He came to bring were not such as they desired—at once dealt honestly with them and told them that Elisha did not heal the lepers in his own country, but one was healed who came from a foreign land. And He led them to infer that very likely He would do His greatest deeds of healing elsewhere than at Nazareth, that God might be pleased to bestow the richest supplies of His grace upon heathens—upon Syrians—and not upon those who seemed to suppose that they had some right or claim to it.

Our Lord, in fact, preached to these people the great doctrine of divine sovereignty, the humbling doctrine of divine election, of which Paul wrote to the Romans, “He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.” [See sermon #442, God’s Will and Man’s Will]

That was the main point of our Savior’s discourse and His fellow townsmen could not endure it, as many since have not been able to endure it—and seeking to end such hateful teaching by murdering the Teacher, they hurried Him from the synagogue to the top of the precipice whereon their city stood, that they might hurl Him down and destroy Him.

I learn, from this incident in our Lord’s life, that it is not the preacher’s business to seek to please his congregation. If he labors for that end, he will in all probability not attain it. But if he should succeed in gaining it, what a miserable success it would be! He must lose the favor of his Master if he should once aim at securing the favor of his fellow men.

We therefore ought to preach many truths which will irritate our hearers. We ought to declare to them the doctrines which are for their present and eternal welfare, however distasteful they may be to their carnal reason and natural inclinations. As the physician must give bitter medicine to his patients if he would cure them of their diseases, so must the preacher, who is truly sent of God, proclaim unpalatable truths to his hearers, and he must preach the more often upon those very bitter truths because men are so unwilling to receive them.

That part of the Gospel which they will readily embrace without any persuasion need not be preached as often—but that part which they will kick at and resist must be enforced again and again, if haply at last their judgment should be convinced of its truth and their heart won for its reception.

By the Holy Spirit's help, I am going to preach to the unconverted with the earnest desire and hope that they will remain unconverted no longer, and my subject is the healing of Naaman the Syrian. There are two points in it that are especially worth noting. The first is *the sovereignty of divine grace* which was manifest in it, and the second is *the unvarying rules by which that grace works*.

I. First then, let us consider THE SOVEREIGNTY OF DIVINE GRACE which was so clearly manifested in the healing of Naaman the Syrian.

And I will observe, at the outset, that *the experience of Naaman equally teaches the freeness of divine grace*. If our Savior had selected this case as an instance, not of the sovereignty, but of the freeness of divine grace, it would have been equally appropriate. Two truths, which sometimes appear to be in opposition, will often prove, if they are examined more closely, to be nestling side by side with one another.

Suppose our Savior had put the case of Naaman thus—"Every person, who was a leper, who applied to Elisha to be healed, was healed, and though one of them came from a foreign country and was a heathen—and a determined enemy of Israel—he was not rejected, for whosoever came to the prophet was accepted and received the blessing."

That would have been a truth, and a most blessed truth too, and a truth which we delight to preach, and which we do preach incessantly. And that truth does not clash with the other truth of which our text speaks—that out of all the lepers who were in Israel in the days of Elisha, none were cleansed save this one stranger from the alien land of Syria. The universality of divine grace is easily reconciled with the sovereignty of it.

Perhaps we cannot reconcile it so that others can see the reconciliation, but we have felt the reconciliation in our own hearts and in our own experience. And for my part it would be as stern a difficulty to see that there is anything irreconcilable between the two doctrines as it seems to be to others to see how the two doctrines can possibly agree. I cannot, for the life of me, detect where they clash, just as some others cannot see how they agree.

I do unfeignedly believe that Christ will in no wise cast out anyone who comes to Him, and I dare to say that to every man and woman of the human race—but I also believe just as firmly that no one comes unto Christ except those whom the Father draws to Him, and that all whom the Father has given to Christ shall surely come to Him. [See sermons #1762, High Doctrine and Broad Doctrine And #2386, The Drawings of Divine Love] Both these statements are true, and therefore, both of them are to be believed, and we may rest assured that they both agree with one another.

But our Savior, on this occasion, though He often preached upon the freeness of divine grace, was pleased to preach upon the sovereignty of it, for *it was the sovereignty of grace that saved Naaman*. He was a heathen, a worshipper of the idol god, Rimmon, yet when he obeyed the prophet's command, he received the healing he asked for, ay, and more than that, he received the salvation of his soul, too.

In addition to being a heathen, this man was a sworn enemy of Israel. He had often led the bands of Syria to plunder the people of God, and yet, for all that, eternal mercy looked with complacency upon him and determined not only that his leprosy should be healed, but that he should be a perpetual monument of the sovereign grace of God.

He also lived far away from the abode of Elisha and in those days, the difficulty of travelling such a distance was exceedingly great—and yet, for all that, the grace of God which passed by the lepers who were living near the prophet's home, went far afield and found out this Syrian soldier—and it is even so to this day.

There are those who have lived ungodly, dishonest, unrighteous, unchaste lives, whom nevertheless God saves by His almighty grace. There are even those who have been enemies of the Gospel, deniers and despisers of it, and some who have been persecutors of God's people, who have, like Saul of Tarsus,

breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, and who have hated the things of God with their whole heart, yet, like Saul of Tarsus, these men have been overcome by the omnipotence of eternal love, and they have been saved by the sovereign grace of God.

Some of these people have, like Naaman, been far off from the means of grace. They have seldom attended the house of prayer, they have been disregards of God's holy Sabbath, and yet, strange to say, the first time they went to the house of God, they found the blessing. They have been sought for by God and found according to His sovereign grace.

'Tis wonderful, but 'tis true, and nobody can long be pastor of such a church as this without observing that it is often the most unlikely persons who are saved. Those who seem to you not likely even to be influenced by divine truth, are the very people who yield to it. Many, whom you have set down as quite incorrigible, have been renewed by sovereign grace. Why it is so, is not for us to know—we can only say, "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight."

This sovereignty of grace, in the case of Naaman, seems all the more remarkable when we think of *the many others who were passed over*, while he was healed. We would have thought, surely, if Elisha can cure lepers, he will begin with those in Israel, of whom our Lord tells us that there were many. But he does not begin with them—what he does is done for Naaman the Syrian. We think, surely, if he can cure lepers, he will cure those who are observers of the ceremonial law, but he does no such thing—he brings healing to this heathen foreign soldier.

At the present day, in every congregation, there are persons who have been brought up in an atmosphere of godliness. The first sound they ever heard was the voice of praise and prayer, and they have lived in such surroundings all their lives—yet they are not converted. They have been at the house of God almost as often as the doors have been open—yet they are not saved. And they are respectable people, too—of excellent morals, very good in many ways, and yet, for all that—whilst publicans and harlots, strangers and foreigners, occasional hearers and the like, have actually been converted and are rejoicing in the blessings of full salvation, these people still remain in the leprosy of their natural depravity and sin—impenitent, unbelieving, unconverted, unpardoned.

How is this and why is it? It is not for us to give any reasons except the one reason that lies upon the surface, which is this—that God will have all men know that there is no one who has any right to salvation, that we are all lost and condemned to begin with, and that if He does save any of us at all, it must be upon the footing of His free, sovereign mercy, and cannot be upon the ground of our own merits and deserts.

Suppose that it were a rule of the kingdom that all the children of pious parents should be converted, there would be many who would say, "My mother was a godly woman, my father was a Christian—and that is all that is required." But it is not so. You are a lost sinner, whatever your mother may have been. And you must repent and be converted just as truly as if you had been the child of the worst drab of the streets.

Even though you may have descended from a long line of saints, you are a sinner and must be pardoned through the infinite mercy of God quite as much as the child of the man who was hanged for committing murder. You must be saved on the same principles as the vilest of the vile must be saved, and to make men see this, God often passes by the children of the godly and calls the children of the godless into the kingdom of His grace.

If everybody who went to the house of God was entitled to the blessings of salvation, many would say, "We attend such-and-such a place of worship and that is sufficient to ensure us a place in the kingdom of heaven." So you seat-holders would conclude that there was no need for you to be anxious and that one of these days, you would be sure to get the blessing.

But my dear hearers, how many have gone to hell from seats in places of worship! How many regular hearers of the Word are also regular unbelievers, who will one day be banished from God's presence with a deeper woe upon them because they knew their duty, yet did it not—they heard the truth, yet did not heed it!

And the Lord makes this to be known among men by often calling, by His grace, those who attend our services, as it were, by accident and by making the Word preached to be the savor of life unto life to them—while those who regularly hear it, yet do not receive it, prove it to be the savor of death unto death to them. And then, if all respectable people were saved, or those only were saved who were respectable, we should have this pretty thing, which is called “respectability” nowadays, seeking to make God its debtor and to cause the Most High to bow down before the respectability of men.

Let a woman but turn aside from the path of virtue, let a man be but once convicted of a crime, and how our self-righteous hands are held up against them. We are so pure, so good, so free from sin that we can afford to say, with the hypocrite of old, “Stand by yourself, come not near me; for I am holier than thou.” We do not wonder that the Lord said, concerning such people, “These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burns all the day.”

How the thrice-holy JEHOVAH must loathe those who hypocritically pretend to be pure when their heart is full of rottenness and uncleanness! Many a man may appear not to be leprous, but the fatal disease is upon him all the while—and only waiting for an opportunity to show itself, as it will do ere long.

Oh, the wicked cant of this self-righteous world, how God hates it! And therefore He comes, and looks for sinners, for real sinners, for those who own that they have gone astray from His ways like lost sheep—and He leaves those who think themselves good, those who are in their own esteem righteous, and He says to them, “According to your belief, you do not need a Savior. Therefore go your way and perish in your sin. But as for those poor lost ones whom you judge to be so full of sin that there is a double necessity for them to be pardoned and saved, it is for just such sinners as these that Jesus died. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

I have heard of a great man, who was once taken to see the French galley slaves, and he had given to him the authority to set free any man whom he found at the galleys to whom he cared to give his liberty. He went to one man and found that he was committed for ten years, and he asked him about his crime. He said that he thought he had been treated very unfairly. He didn’t know that he had done much amiss. Perhaps he had, once or twice, taken a little that was not his, but the temptation to which he had yielded was very strong and he had done so much good in other ways that he really thought he was very hardly treated in being sent to the galleys. So the gentleman passed him by—he was too good a man to receive a free pardon.

There was another who said that he was perfectly innocent. He even swore that he was as innocent as a new-born babe of every accusation that had been brought against him. The gentleman also passed him by, for he too was too good to be freely forgiven.

Then he came to another, who said that he might have tripped perhaps, but much more was made of it than was true, and there were liars in court, and perjury had been committed by a great many of the witnesses against him, and he knew a great many men, who were twice as bad as he was, yet they were at liberty while he was there in chains. That man was not the one to be pardoned.

At last, the visitor came to a poor fellow who said to him, “I have a long sentence to serve, but I fully deserve even more than that sentence. I wonder that I was not condemned to death, for had they proceeded to extremities, they might have proved me guilty of murder, so I look upon my sentence as much lighter than I really deserve to suffer.” Then he who had received the authority to pardon whom he pleased, said, “I pardon you, for, according to your own confession, you appear to be the only man in the whole place who is really receiving justice, and therefore I will show you mercy, so you may go your way as a free man.”

In like manner, the Lord Jesus Christ is always ready to bestow His mercy upon those who confess that they deserve the heaviest sentence of His justice. But as long as we kick against that, we cannot expect Him to look upon us in love.

II. Now I think I have spoken sufficiently upon the sovereignty of grace, so I want to enlist your earnest attention to another part of the subject as I try to show you that, in the case of Naaman, sovereign grace followed THE UNVARYING RULES OF GRACE.

God is a Sovereign and may therefore save whom He wills, and He may also save them how He wills. Yet when He is about to save a man, He does not depart from His usual method of working, but saves him according to the way in which He is accustomed to save.

Let me call your attention, first, to the fact that, although Naaman was to be healed, and although divine sovereignty ordained the healing, *it was needful that he should first hear the good news of the possibility of healing*. The ordinary way in which a sinner is saved is this, "Faith comes by hearing." It is as simple as possible. We hear the message and we believe it.

So, Naaman must first hear about the possibility of his being healed—but how is he to hear? Where is the preacher who will wend his way to Syria and tell him about the Lord's prophet in Samaria? There is no need for any preacher to go on that long journey—a little maid is taken captive and she conveys the necessary message. That is all that is required.

It was through a suitable messenger that Naaman was healed and blessed, so let none of us ever get into our heads the idea that God will save His own, and therefore there is no need for us to go out to seek them, or to preach to them when we have found them. He will not save them apart from His own way—which way is that the preacher shall be sent and the person to be blessed shall hear the Gospel—and when he hears it, he shall be constrained to believe it.

Hence we, who are preachers, must continue to preach the Word, and you, who are unsaved hearers, must make a point of endeavoring to hear the Gospel message, for that is both your privilege and your duty. God's own message to you is, "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear and your soul shall live." Therefore give your most earnest attention to the gracious message of mercy which God sends to you by His servants.

Next, when Naaman has heard that there is healing to be had in Israel, *he must give heed to the message* and make a long journey in order to reach the Lord's prophet. He would not have been healed if he had sat down and said, "I have heard about this possibility of being healed of my leprosy, but I shall take no trouble to see whether it is true or not."

Oh, no! He does not talk like that, but he gives orders for the horses and camels to be brought out, and the talents of silver, and the pieces of gold, and the changes of raiment that he will need for use as presents, and he departs for that far country where he hopes to receive the blessing that he desires.

And sinners, if you really wish to be saved, you must remember that God will save you through your attentively listening to the Gospel message that He sends to you and rousing your spirits to do what that message bids you do. God does not convert sinners while they are asleep. The Gospel is not absorbed by men as water is absorbed by a sponge, by a kind of insensible action.

The truth comes to the mind of the hearer and he is impressed by it. And being impressed by it, he lays it to heart, and gives his whole soul to its comprehension and reception. And if you would be converted, you must get the truth into your very soul. You must not play with it, you must not toy with it, you must not trifle with it—but you must be in earnest about the matter—you must, as the apostle says, "Lay hold on eternal life." There must be an agonizing and a wrestling that you may enter into the full appropriation and possession of the truth which is proclaimed in your hearing.

When Naaman had come to the prophet Elisha, he was not healed merely because he had heard the little maid's message, and because he had heard it with such a measure of attention that he had given earnest heed to it, but *it was also imperative upon him that he should obey the command he received*. "Go," said the prophet, "and wash in Jordan seven times." Naaman was ordained to be healed, yet he never would have been healed without the washing that Elisha commanded.

And there is no sinner, be the purposes of God what they may, who will ever get his sins forgiven except by washing in the precious blood of Jesus. It matters not who you may be—unless you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ you cannot have eternal life. Do not suppose, dear hearers, that there is some

secret decree of God that will override this—there is no such decree. The truth with which you have to do is this, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

If you do not believe in Jesus, there is no hope for you. There remains, neither in God, nor in anyone else, any hope for you. The way of salvation is set before you and it is quite as simple as Elisha’s command to Naaman to wash seven times in Jordan. The Gospel is that Jesus Christ suffered in the place of all sinners who trust Him as their Savior, that He endured what they ought to have endured and made atonement to God for all the sins that they would ever commit. And if you thus trust Him, you are saved. The simple act of relying upon Jesus as your Substitute and Savior puts away your guilt and sin forever.

But if you say, “This plan of salvation is too simple to be safe. I thought that there would be some imposing ceremony to be performed, I fancied that there would be certain mysterious feelings to be experienced.” If you talk like this, you cannot be healed. It is the eternal purpose of God that we shall be saved through faith in Jesus Christ, and if there is no faith in Jesus Christ, that is a proof that there is no divine purpose to heal that soul. But where there is the divine purpose to heal, it is evidenced, sooner or later, by a submissive yielding to the ordained way of salvation and simple trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice once more, *Naaman was not healed until he was humbled*. It was God’s purpose to heal him. He had been set apart by sovereign grace to be healed, yet he had to be humbled before the blessing could come to him. While his pride was so great, he could not be healed. Why should he wash in the Jordan? Were not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, quite as good as the Jordan? Why should he wash there? Is he not high in the esteem of his master, the king of Syria? Why should he stoop to this indignity? He will not do anything of the kind.

But if he will not, be he who he may, he cannot be healed. Though he is such a great man, there is no healing for him without humbling—and it is so with those who would be cured of the leprosy of sin. There is no hope of heaven for you unless you are humbled. As long as you have a rag of your righteousness that you trust in, you cannot have the robe of Christ’s righteousness to cover you. If you glory in what you have, and what you are, you are not the kind of man whom God delights to save. You must lie low at the feet of Jesus. You must plead for forgiveness like a poor guilty sinner. You must cry, “Jesus save me, or I die!” or else through the gate of heaven you are too big to pass for “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way,” and no self-righteousness can go in thereat.

“But” says one, “I have always been a regular attendant at a place of worship. I have always paid twenty shillings in the pound. I give a guinea to the hospital and I believe myself to be, on the whole, a most excellent person.” I do not suppose that anybody will say just that, but I mean that great many will think it. And I want all such people to plainly understand that, until they get all this horrible boasting out of their soul, they will no more go to heaven than the devil himself will.

But if any man here confesses that he is a mass of iniquity—that even his best works have something bad in them, that his prayings has to be wept over, and his tears of repentance have to be washed to get the filth out of them—if there is a sinner here, a real black or scarlet sinner, he is the man who is freely invited to come and put his trust in Jesus, for it is “a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,” even the very chief. Pride must come down, self-righteousness must die and the sinner must glorify the grace of God by owning that he has no merit of his own—or he cannot be saved.

What shall we say, then, to these things? Just this. Let us all go together to the throne of God where we have offended and let us confess that none of us have any claims upon Him. Let each of us say to Him, “My Lord, if You should destroy me, I must confess that I deserve it. If You should save my brother, who is equally guilty, and not save me, I dare not complain, for You have the right to exercise Your mercy wherever and however You will. I shall receive the sentence that is just even if I am banished from Your presence forever.”

Submit to the Lord as the burgesses of Calais came to the conquering king with ropes about their necks. That is the proper costume for a sinner to wear before God. Say, “Lord, I deserve to die. I deserve

to perish. I deserve to be destroyed. I will have no quibbles with You about my sentence, for how can a worm dispute with the Almighty? Who am I that I should reply against my Maker?"

When you have taken that position, rely upon the freeness of divine grace. Grasp, as with a death-clutch, this great fact, and say, "Lord, You do forgive sinners for Your own name's sake. You cannot find anything in us that is good, anything that can move You to pity. But oh, by Your mercy and Your love, let men see what a gracious God You are! For Your great name's sake, have mercy upon us and save us!"

And you can plead that Jesus said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." And that He has bidden His servants say, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Plead with Him that He has said, "Come now, and let us reason together...Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Go and plead in that way and trust yourself upon the truth revealed in the Word of God. Try it, and prove it, and see whether God really means what He says. Say to Him,—

*"You have promised to forgive
All who in Thy Son believe;
Lord, I know Thou canst lie;
Give me Christ, or else I die."*

I will not say to you—Go and risk it, for there is no risk. I will not say to you—Go and venture, for it is no venture. Go and say to the Lord, "O Lord, if I must perish, I will perish trusting in Your mercy through the precious blood of Jesus, Your dear Son! 'Other refuge have I none.' I cast aside all my former confidences, and all my boastings, and come as the worst sinner must come, for I feel that, in some respects, I am the worst sinner who ever came to You. I come as an utterly lost, undone, bankrupt sinner, and I look to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus for all that, I need."

Then, if you perish like that, I am quite willing to perish with you. And I will stand at the bar of God with you on the same terms, for if you are lost, I must be lost too. I solemnly avow that I have no hope in anything I have ever done. I have preached the Gospel these many years, but I have not preached one sermon that I can look upon with any confidence so far as to depend upon it as a merit in the sight of God. After we are saved, we may do something in the way of almsgiving and other things to show our gratitude to God, but they are worse than useless if we begin to boast of them as a reason for our salvation. My song is,—

*"I the chief of sinners am,
But Jesus died for me."*

I know He did, and I hope many of you can say the same thing. We are in the same boat, and if we go down, God will have to go down too, for it would stain His honor for anyone to be lost trusting in Jesus. But we shall never go down if we are trusting in Him. We shall stand when the great floods are out, and the heavens are pouring forth their deluge of devouring rain. We shall stand, for we are built upon a rock if we are trusting in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. God grant that we may all be found there, and His shall be the praise forever and ever. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALM 107:23-82

Verses 23-24. *They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep.*

The Jews were never given to navigation. To “go down to the sea in ships,” seemed a very extraordinary thing to them. They looked upon it as a going down, as it were, into a dreadful abyss. We who are more accustomed to going to sea than they were, talk of “the high seas,” but they spoke of going “down to the sea.”

They never went to sea except on business. King Solomon had no pleasure yacht. There was never one of that ancient race who cared to trust himself upon the sea except as a matter of sheer necessity—and those who did so were looked upon with wonder by their land-loving friends. “They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the LORD”—that is, His greatest works, both in the sea and on it. They know what storms are, and they see what omnipotence can do, and they come back to tell of the wonders of God upon the mighty deep.

This verse may be read spiritually as well as literally. God calls some of His servants, as it were, to go down to the sea in ships. They are tried with poverty, with personal sickness, with temptation, with inward conflicts, with fierce persecutions. And God never calls them to these trials out of mere caprice, there is always a reason for it. They go down to the sea in ships to “do business in great waters.” There is something to be gained from their trials and something to be learned from them. They “do business in great waters” and “these see the works of the LORD.”

Others hear about them and believe what they are told concerning them. But these see them. They see what God has done in their case—how He sustains, how He delivers, how He sanctifies trials, and overrules them for His own glory and His people’s good. “These *see* the works of the LORD.”

And they also see the wonders of the economy of grace. They are made to experience the heights and depths, the lengths and breadths of that love which passes knowledge. They see “His wonders in the deep.” You and I need not desire to have trouble, as though we put out to sea for our own pleasure, but if God calls us to sail upon a sea of troubles, if He sends us there upon His business, we may depend upon it that He means that business to end to our profit and His glory.

25-27.—*For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit’s end.*

Here we learn something of what sailors see and of what tried Christians experience. These great storms arise by God’s command—not as many say, nowadays, “by the laws of nature.” The wind, which had been quiet, heard God’s voice and raises itself up, like a wild beast from its lair. “He commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind.” And no sooner does the great wind begin to blow than the white crests of the waves are seen, and the white horses fly before the blast which lifts up the waves on high.

Then the ship, however staunch it be, seems to have no greater power of resistance than a frail sea bird. And it is tossed up and down, up and down, from the trough of the sea to the billows’ crown—“They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths.” And their very soul begins to melt. Brave men as they are, it only needs a sufficient amount of storm to make their hearts turn to water and their spirits dissolve into the turbulent element that is all round them. “Their soul is melted because of trouble.”

Then they cannot keep their standing—“they reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man.” What is worse, they cannot control their brains—they “are at their wit’s end.” What can they do in such a case as that? There is an end to all human wit and wisdom when the great storms are out upon the sea.

You who have ever had deep spiritual trials know the analogy of all this. There may come times—there have come times to some of us—when, at the command of God, or by divine permission, there has been a fierce blast of temptation or a fiery trial—and then all that was peaceful round us before suddenly turns into a whirlpool of tempestuous billows, and we are tossed to and fro at the mercy of the winds and the waves.

Sometimes we ascend in presumption and then we go down into the very depths of despair. At one moment, we are joyous with hope and a moment later, we seem ready to give all hope up—our courage fails us and our soul dissolves within us. If you have never known this experience, I pray that you never

may know it, but some of us have had stormy times when we have seemed to have no foothold, when we have reeled to and fro like drunken men—when the best faith we have had has been little better than staggering. Still, it is better to stagger on the promise than to stagger at it—and we did still stand though we staggered and we were at our wit's end. We could not see what to do, we could not tell what to do, and we could not have done it if we had known what to do. We were brought to such an extremity that we seemed to have neither wit nor wisdom left.

28. *Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.*

This shows that although they were at their wit's end, they had wit enough or wisdom enough to pray. Their souls were melted, so they let them run out in prayer. It is a good thing to get the soul melted, for then it will flow out like water before the Lord.

Note that these sailors cried to God when there was no one else to whom they could cry—"Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble." Learn from this sentence that, when your soul is melted because of trouble, you can still pray. When you reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, you can still pray—and when you are at your wit's end—you can still pray.

Prayer is never out of season. It is a fruit of grace that is acceptable to God in autumn and in winter, in spring and in summer. Long as you live, and even when the worst comes to the worst, cry mightily unto God, for He will surely hear you. Was it not so with us when we were in spiritual trouble and could do nothing else but cry unto the Lord? It was a poor prayer that we offered, but it was a real prayer that we presented when we cried unto God.

Mark how quick God is to hear such prayer as this—"Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses." He brought them into them and therefore He brought them out of them. It was God who took Jacob into Egypt and therefore, though it took four hundred years to bring Israel out of Egypt, God brought them out at last. He kills and He makes alive. He wounds and He heals. Rest in this truth as a matter of absolute certainty.

29. *He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still.*

At the first, God made everything out of nothing, so He can easily make a calm out of a storm. And He can make the storm a calm for you whenever He pleases to do so. Your troubled feelings, your tossing to and fro, may soon subside into "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding," which "shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

30. *Then are they glad because they are quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.*

And there is no music that is sweeter to the mariner's ears than the rattle of the chain as the anchor grips the bottom of the harbor and the ship rests from all her tossing. The Lord will give you grace, my brother, my sister, to let down your anchor—or rather, to throw it up "into that within the veil," for that is the way that your anchor goes—and then you shall be glad because you will be quiet.

I believe that there is often a greater, fuller, deeper joy in being quiet than there is in making a noise. There are times when it is good to praise the Lord with the high-sounding cymbals and with the harp of a solemn sound. But in the deepest joy of all, we are still before God and praise is silent before God in Zion.

31. *Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!*

Should they not do so? Those who have survived the storms at sea, or the still greater storms within their own souls, should surely take care to praise the Lord. If we know how to pray, we also ought to know how to praise. Prayer and praise ought to form the two covers of the book of our life—and our life is not well bound unless these are the two covers to it, with a good stiff back of faith to bind the two covers firmly together and to hold every leaf in its proper place.

32. *Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.*

Let them not only praise the Lord in private, but let them also sound out their song of gratitude to God where the greybeards are gathered together, and let the men of experience, the officers of the church, the leaders of the Lord's people, help them in the expression of their gratitude.

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